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Russian nationalism and foreign policy: the regime nexus¹

Luke March

‘Nationalism’ is one of the most poorly understood themes in the analysis of Russian foreign policy (RFP). Many accounts do not recognise the concept, arguing that RFP is rational, pragmatic and interest-based. For others, nationalism has become ever more dominant in Putin-era politics. However, accounts that investigate nationalism and foreign policy specifically in depth are relatively few. Indeed, most either look at nationalism as one, often marginal, offshoot of RFP generally, or have an explicit domestic focus (e.g. nationalist intellectuals, movements, political parties or subcultures) with little direct engagement with RFP. Many accounts that do engage with nationalism and RFP do in a normative, alarmist and stereotypical way, where nationalism is an omnipresent but ill-defined threat, conflated with aggression, imperialism and general mischief-making.

Such divergent approaches have very different implications for such central questions as what motivates RFP, what is the role of domestic politics therein, what are the factors of continuity and change in Russian and Soviet foreign policy, and what are the implications of specific foreign policy actions (especially towards Ukraine after the 2014 annexation of Crimea). Unpicking the role of nationalism is thus (or should be) a central concern.

This chapter discusses different approaches to nationalism and RFP. In the first section, it outlines definitional issues and justifies the concept of nationalism used. The second section then analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the main approaches towards nationalism and RFP espoused by the main theoretical ‘schools’ of RFP analysis (realist, constructivist and liberal approaches). The following section argues that only multilevel and theoretically eclectic regime-focussed approaches which explicitly explore the intersections between nationalism, domestic and foreign policy can give a sufficiently measured, nuanced and non-normative analysis; the fourth section outlines some testable hypotheses resulting from this approach; the fifth highlights some future areas for research; the final section concludes.

This chapter’s over-riding argument is that nationalism is a valuable but often misrepresented focus of RFP research. First, nationalism cannot be a parsimonious prism through which to interpret the *entirety* of RFP, and above all foreign policy behaviour. Second, prevalent approaches which attribute homogeneity and uniformity to nationalism as somehow a ‘driver’ of foreign policy are among the most simplistic and contentious. Third, this notwithstanding, nationalism provides a vital addition to the palette of approaches to understanding RFP. Its main virtue is its ability, when accurately defined and utilised, to identify the linkages between domestic values, regime structures and foreign policy discourses.

‘Nationalist’ foreign policy – defining the undefinable?

There is a significant conceptual problem with identifying nationalism as practised by states, rather than non-state groups. As John Breuilly argues (1993, pp. 10–11), ‘nationalist’ states are in the eye of the beholder: those whose policies defend ‘national

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interests' and which other states might regard as 'assertive' or 'aggressive' are so universal that 'governmental nationalism' is a meaningless category unless there is an obvious, direct link between government and a nationalist movement. As outlined below, in Russia, such an obvious link has rarely existed. The problem is compounded because many analysts approach nationalism in a profoundly normative, even Orientalist way (Laruelle, 2014); indeed there has long been a central argument that Russian nationalism is uniquely negative; revanchist and aggressive, alongside a research stream exposing the individuals or ideas who support such views (e.g. Allensworth, 1998; Yanov, 1995). Adding to the complexity is the tendency for states to refer to their own nationally-oriented policies as 'patriotic', reserving 'nationalist' to describe other states' similar policies, a tendency from which Russia provides no exception.

For the purposes of this analysis, I adopt a broad and non-normative definition that 'nationalism is primarily a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent' (Gellner, 1983, p. 1). As such, nationalism argues for 'the recognition of a people (nation) [*narod (natsiia)*] as the source of state power and the main agent [*sub''ekt*] of the political system' (Verkhovskii and Pain, 2012, p. 52; cf. Laine, 2017, p. 223). A nationalist policy asserts 1) that there exists a nation with an explicit character; 2) that the interests/values of this nation take priority over those of other nations; and 3) that the nation must be as independent/sovereign as possible (Breuilly, 1993, p. 2). Therefore, with a nationalist foreign policy, we would expect ideational tendencies reflecting these principles, in particular evidence of messianism, exclusionism or chauvinism, inasmuch as the interests of the core nation are seen as pre-eminent, not only in relation to domestic ethnic groups but foreign ones as well.

Specifically concerning Russia, we might regard a nationalist foreign policy as one that aligns ideationally with the foreign policy preferences of nationalist groups, even if such groups' direct influence on policy outcomes is indistinct. Russian nationalist groups are themselves so divided that it only makes sense to talk of Russian nationalisms in the plural. The principal division was traditionally between multi-ethnic imperialist 'empire-savers' and ethno-nationalist 'nation-builders' (Szporluk, 1989). However, with further subdivisions, the increasing salience of ethno-nationalism and the co-mingling of these ideal types, this division is now too simplistic (Kolstø, 2016a; Laruelle, 2017a). Broadly, however, such groups can be regarded as belonging to a 'hard-line nationalist' camp who wish to defend (ethnic) Russian cultural norms, language and religion and insist on Russia's national uniqueness and independence (Tsygankov, 2009). As outlined further below, many see Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea as an archetypal example of nationalist foreign policy, inasmuch as it was partially justified on the basis of defending ethnic Russians and reuniting the ethnic Russian nation allegedly divided by arbitrary borders.

Nationalism also needs to be conceptually distinguished from patriotism. For many, these are antithetical concepts: 'good' patriotism is counterposed to chauvinistic nationalism (Gries et al., 2011). However, for the purposes of this study, they should be seen as ontologically separate even if practically intertwined concepts. Patriotism entails individual feelings towards the community (e.g. pride in one's country), whereas nationalism involves group feelings towards the state (primarily, the desire for the state to represent the nation) (Baker, 2012). So, patriotism need not be political, whereas nationalism is so by definition. The distinction is important in the Russian context, since the state's 'managed nationalism' described below essentially attempts to defuse nationalism's mobilisational potential in favour of a depoliticised patriotism that

reinforces acquiescence in the status quo.

Approaches to nationalism and foreign policy: driver or driven?

This section outlines the chief conceptual approaches to the role of nationalism in RFP, outlining their main strengths and weaknesses. Of course, any such categorisation is schematic and somewhat simplistic. Far from all analysts declare an overt theoretical position, nor is everyone consistent across their body of work. Many works approach nationalism from an area-studies rather than IR perspective, and thus address very specific aspects of the issue (e.g. the rise of hate crime, the role of skinhead groups, the ideology of the Russian Orthodox Church), without attempting to make many broader inferences about the regime, still less about foreign policy (e.g. Mitrofanova, 2012; Pilkington et al., 2013). However, the following presents a viable heuristic framework for understanding the main tenets of the most prevalent views.

Realism and the non-importance of ideology

Realist (or geopolitical) approaches are probably the most influential among scholars of RFP, but are also those that say least about nationalism. It is well known that classical realism's main concern is with system-level factors, and there is little emphasis put either on considering domestic factors generally, or prising open the black box of foreign-policy making in particular (Pursiainen, 2000).

Such approaches conceptualise state policy in terms of stable, rational national interests focussed on issues of 'hard' security, geopolitics and economic gain. Specifically, many regard Russian foreign policy as 'based on classic realist notions of international politics in which states pursue their conception of national interests without fear of favour' (Sakwa, 2016, p. 120). Such 'classically realist' geopolitical axioms include balance-of-power and spheres of influence, embedded in a Hobbesian mindset of a zero-sum conflict of all against all (e.g. Lo, 2003; Mankoff, 2009). Realist analyses have little truck with more subjective, values-based motivations, including ideational factors and national identity generally or nationalism specifically. 'Russia Inc.' is viewed as a pragmatic, cynical and non-ideological power, focussed on economic self-interest above all (Trenin, 2007).

Central to realist views of RFP is long-term continuity. Churchill's view that the key to the Soviet enigma is 'national interest' might equally apply to post-Soviet politics, irrespective of domestic fluctuations. Even Russia's 2014 Crimea intervention, which to some is 'nationalist' foreign policy *par excellence*, is regarded as largely more of the same. According to Mearsheimer (2014, p. 81), it is 'Geopolitics 101: great powers are always sensitive to potential threats near their home territory'; in this case threats posed by Western expansion via NATO to Sevastopol. Others have highlighted how the Ukrainian crisis indicates realist postulates need to be brought even more to the centre of analysis than hitherto (e.g. Kotkin, 2016).

Realist approaches' intuitive plausibility is reinforced by the evident utilisation of geopolitical guiding tenets in official RFP doctrine, which traditionally evince 'very rational language and ... formal strategies' (Forsberg and Pursiainen, 2017, p. 12). An emphasis on pragmatism and sober rationality are also central to elite justifications of RFP, particularly during crisis periods. For example, following the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reiterated that the only ideology determining foreign policy was 'common sense and the supremacy of international law' (Lavrov, 2008).

However, realist approaches look far less robust under the microscope. In particular, they make the fundamental mistake of taking official discourse at face value, rather than investigating its role in regime legitimation and self-justification. After all, analysts weren't confined to using Marxist-Leninist lenses to interpreting Soviet ideology; it was accepted that the degree to which Soviet conduct followed ideological postulates needed investigation, not *a priori* acceptance (Robinson, 1995).

In particular, the idea that Russia has 'permanent' interests as a great power is a staple of contemporary state discourse. As Putin put it in his Millennium Manifesto, Russian great-poweriness is 'preconditioned by the inseparable characteristics of its geopolitical, economic and cultural existence. They determined the mentality of Russians and the policy of the government throughout the history of Russia and they cannot but do so at present' (Putin, 1999). Striving to return to a supposedly deserved 'rightful' status forms the crux of the contemporary foreign policy consensus (Lukyanov, 2016). However, such arguments are anachronistic, neatly homogenising history to further regime legitimacy. That the national interests of an ideological superpower (the USSR), the much smaller and weaker (geopolitically and economically) contemporary Russia and the Tsarist Empire can be reduced to fundamentally continuous great-poweriness is more act of faith than serious analysis.

Certainly, several analysts hold that the Soviet system reflected nationalist elements alongside Communist principles, with particular resemblance to the policies of Nikolai I. According to Robert Tucker (1991, p. 29), the Leninist system was 'a kind of neo-czarist order that called itself "socialist"'. For David Brandenburger (2010) the Stalin period in particular was marked by 'Russocentric Etatism', whereby Marxism-Leninism was downgraded in favour of Russian historical themes. However, such continuity is much overstated. It is more accurate to see Russocentric geopolitics and Marxism-Leninism coexisting in what Vladislav Zubok (2009) calls the 'revolutionary-imperial paradigm.' Recent research shows that Soviet leaders took ideology very seriously (Gould-Davies, 1999). Generally, neither geopolitical nor ideological components lent themselves to unthinking expansionism. Indeed, Soviet interventions in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan (especially the latter) were undertaken reluctantly and somewhat reactively after much Politburo debate (Zubok, 2009). Indeed, the 2014 annexation of Crimea appears much more precipitate in comparison and hardly shows a historical reflex.

Moreover, whereas realism has broad-brush explanatory power, it cannot explain the detailed evolution of post-Soviet RFP. Certainly, identifying the common thread of a push-back against Western (especially NATO and EU) incursion into Russia's sphere of influence broadly explains how Russia has subverted 'coloured revolutions' in its 'near abroad' and why it intervened directly in Georgia and Ukraine to reinforce 'red lines' preventing their movement Westwards. However, this does not explain exceptionality and inconsistency, e.g. why Putin acquiesced in NATO expansion in the early 2000s, why Russia intervened militarily in Ukraine in 2014 but not in 2004-5, or why Russia actively helped oust Kurmanbek Bakiyev in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 (Götz, 2016). Most strikingly, realism fails to account for why the West is construed as an existential threat, when both NATO and the EU are divided, often weak and decreasingly expansionist, with, in particular, NATO enlargement to Ukraine barely realistic after 2008 (Macfarlane, 2016). In contrast, the rise of China, especially its encroachment to Russia's south and east, and its rising economic and military power, which ought certainly to figure highly in any 'objective' list of Russia's security threats, has not been securitised in Russian discourse (Kaczmarek, 2012).

Overall, many realist accounts still take insufficient account of subjective domestic motivations. Official regime discourse is accepted at face value, and is assumed to be constant and not fundamentally domestically contested. Most curiously, given his status as one of the foremost analysts of Russian politics, Richard Sakwa's *Frontline Ukraine* (2015) lacks substantive focus on Russian domestic politics. This account's coverage of nationalism is limited to 'monist' Ukrainian nationalism, whose virulence is allegedly deleterious to Ukraine's Russian-speakers, as argued by Russia's official discourse.

Certainly, some more nuanced realist accounts do acknowledge the role of domestic constituencies. In particular, neo-classical realism accords a role for regime factors as intervening variables in translating external, geopolitical incentives into domestic politics (Charap and Welt, 2015; Simão, 2012). This is potentially a useful prism for examining how nationalist politicians and interest groups intervene in foreign policy making in response to external factors (Laruelle, 2015).

However, even neo-classical realism gives insufficient credence to the role of domestic factors in interpreting and shaping, as well as being shaped by, external pressures. For instance an otherwise sophisticated account inspired by neo-classical realism argues that Vladimir Putin is little more than a "transmitter" responsible for translating geopolitical imperatives into foreign-policy behavior' (Götz, 2016, p. 17). This view clashes diametrically with most scholarly approaches to Russian domestic politics who argue that Putin's role is absolutely pivotal. As regards nationalism, Laruelle (2015, p. 88) sees it more as a *post-hoc explanation* for foreign policy discourse than a direct driver of the RFP agenda (see further below). Whereas this has a strong kernel of truth, it downplays the extent to which nationalist ideas may inform mainstream discourse and thereby reflexively affect policy making in a more diffuse and long-term way.

Constructivism and the centrality of identity

In contrast to realist accounts, constructivist approaches do put ideational factors, including values, identity and status, far more to the fore (e.g. Clunan, 2009; Tsygankov, 2010). They highlight how 'national interests' are themselves subjective, contested, emotional and strongly ideational. A vital claim is that national identity debates are central; in particular, the West is the significant Other in interlocution with which Russian identity is constructed. Aspirations towards Western recognition of Russia's Great Power status, and of associated national values, especially sovereignty, are constants in Russia's relationship with the West and explain the fluctuating and frictional nature of this interaction. This also helps explain how China, whose role in Russian identity construction is minimal and largely uncontested, its not construed as a security threat. So for constructivists, security threats, and national interests *in toto*, are 'what states make of them'.

Many constructivists do not dwell on nationalism explicitly. However, their emphasis on ideational factors indicates significant potential overlap with the topic at hand. For instance, authors have highlighted how Russian assertiveness has been underpinned by a new focus on 'soft power' from c. 2007 onwards, which seeks to promote Russia as a 'value centre' (Feklyunina, 2016; Monaghan, 2008a). Among such values, Russian culture and language, and the notion of *Russkii mir* (Russian World) have taken increasingly prominent roles. In this way, RFP has taken an increasingly 'civilisational turn' since the late 2000s, whereby its formerly realist *Weltanschauung* has been increasingly infused with ideas of Russian exceptionalism, informed by a

focus on Russian linguistic, cultural and spiritual uniqueness (Tsygankov, 2016). Arguably, this made assertive defence of Russian speakers in Ukraine unavoidable (Zevelev, 2014).

Furthermore, several constructivist authors do accord prominence to nationalist discourses. In particular, there are three generally accepted foreign policy tendencies, whose interaction drives foreign policy articulation: the liberals/Westernisers, statist/pragmatic nationalists and the aforementioned hard-line nationalists/civilisationalists (Tsygankov, 2009). This latter camp is represented among most parliamentary political parties (especially the Liberal Democrats [LDPR] and Communists [KPRF]) as well as among the non-party elite. For most of the Putin era the statist (among which he is counted) were the most influential group and the nationalists the least (Zevelev, 2014). Despite giving them occasional rhetorical concessions, the authorities have generally regarded nationalist policies as geopolitically confrontational and economically counterproductive (Tsygankov, 2009). However, the rise of the civilisationalist discourse may show changes afoot. In particular, the statist's emphasis on anti-Western *ressentiment* (the sense of envy that reinforces particularistic pride and xenophobia as parts of national identity) indicates that the statist is closer to the nationalist than often assumed (Smith, 2012). The Putin circle has developed a visceral anti-Western conspiriography (Zygar', 2016). Such proclivities allow nationalist ideas (usually, but not exclusively, pragmatic ones) to act as 'conceptual "road maps"' steering foreign policy (Jackson, 2003, p. 173).

Accordingly, the main relevance of constructivist approaches is in prioritising the role of identity debates in RFP, which are focussed predominantly on Russia's relationship with the West, and in seeing nationalists as active participants in them. However, whereas unlike realism, constructivism does explicitly focus on the domestic/foreign policy interaction, it also suffers from a macro-level approach that helps identify general trends but is often insufficiently fine-grained to understand the twists and turns of foreign policy making. For example, the focus on Europe as Russia's Other potentially obfuscates the many convolutions of Kremlin policy, from the explicit pro-Europeanism of Putin's early years, partially recaptured in the Medvedev interregnum, to the increasing emphasis on Russian exceptionalism and non-European essence in Putin's fourth term. Arguably, the discursive focus obscures more accurate and nuanced attention towards domestic policy shifts. For instance, Laruelle (2015) argues that there is no nationalist 'school' in Russian politics with direct impact on foreign policy. The 'hard-line nationalist' camp is thus more a heuristic ideal type than an accurate depiction of policy influence.

The normativity of liberalism

'Liberal' approaches do not necessarily correspond to 'neoliberal institutionalist' IR theories (focussing on international co-operation), and they rarely display as cohesive a theoretical position as the two aforementioned approaches (indeed their epistemology is often implicit). However, this group encompasses those influenced by democratisation/transition theories, which critique Russia for its increasing authoritarianism (Shevtsova, 2014; Stoner and McFaul, 2015). Such viewpoints focus more explicitly on domestic politics than the previous two, and bring the role of nationalism therein much more to the fore. That said, the implications of the liberal stance are more problematic, inasmuch as there is a normative focus that leads to potential inaccuracy and exaggeration.

As regards domestic policy, liberals see nationalism as playing a core role. They generally regard it as on the rise, since it is associated with a general trend towards increasing elite repression and/or manipulation of the political space. Specifically, the elite uses and abuses nationalism to mobilise regime support by creating an image of national crisis and external enemies, a ‘besieged fortress’ that creates a ‘rally round the flag effect’, mobilising disparate constituencies around the national leadership in a quasi-war footing, and simultaneously delegitimising the domestic opposition as unpatriotic quislings (Shevtsova, 2015a). Indeed, the Putin-era Kremlin has periodically attacked its domestic opponents as ‘unpatriotic’ fifth-columnists, a tendency particularly marked in the immediate aftermath of the 2014 Crimea annexation.

Furthermore, the Kremlin’s active propagation of nationalist actors has helped move nationalism from the Yeltsin-era political margins to the Putin-era mainstream. Most notorious are the nationalist/imperialist ideologues and ‘shock jocks’ who have increasing visibility as regime cheerleaders and/or ideologues. Most column inches have been devoted to the propagandist Aleksandr Dugin, the progenitor of modern neo-Eurasianism (e.g. Umland, 2007). Some have gone as far as to attribute him direct policy influence as ‘Putin’s brain’ (Barbashin and Thoburn, 2014). Many assert that Eurasianism underpins an allegedly increasingly concrete new regime ideology (Clover, 2016; Laqueur, 2015). At the same time, the Kremlin has actively encouraged quasi-nationalistic GONGOs such as Nashi and Molodaya gvardiya, and has developed often ambiguous relations with a range of other, more hard-line groups such as Russkii obraz.

A cardinal example of the apparently inexorable rise of nationalism has been Putin’s so-called ‘conservative turn’ after 2012. The regime increasingly distinguished itself from Western liberalism by emphasising ‘biopolitical conservatism’, i.e. ‘traditional values’ such as spirituality, the nuclear family and patriotism (Makarychev and Yatsyk, 2014). This had a domestic dimension (e.g. new legislation against blasphemy, ‘gay propaganda’, and increased restrictions on the extra-parliamentary opposition) but also a more marked foreign policy dimension, with the securitisation of identity and civilizational values (Zevelev, 2016). A common view, albeit one that ignores a lot of continuities, was that ‘Russia’s foreign policy ha[d] undergone a “paradigm shift” from state-driven foreign policy to one driven by ethno-nationalist ideas’ (Tsygankov, 2015, pp. 279–280).

The conservative turn had a plausible domestic rationale, i.e. Putin’s weakening support after the 2011-2 electoral protests, particularly among more educated, urban strata, necessitated reinforcing his support among more traditionalist rural and small-town electorates, and administratively and discursively marginalising the liberal opposition as unpatriotic degenerates, a campaign most visible in the victimisation of the ‘Pussy Riot’ collective in 2012.

Liberal views (e.g. Shevtsova, 2015b; Treisman, 2014) see the Crimean escapade as an extension of these domestic tactics: the use of a ‘short, victorious war’ as a diversionary tactic to boost Putin’s flailing popularity. As with the Georgian war in 2008, Putin’s poll-ratings hit stratospheric heights in the aftermath of an intervention that reinforced Russia assertiveness and its return as a Great Power to be reckoned with.

Such views are clearly right to focus on nationalism’s utility for regime legitimacy. There is a long tradition of the Russian state utilising nationalist themes and groups for societal consolidation. In the Tsarist era, Official Nationality, Uvarov’s Triad of Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality, was intended to challenge the appeal of revolutionary liberalism (Riasanovsky, 1959), while at the turn of the 20th century,

the regime actively fostered nationalist groups to intimidate anti-regime challengers (Laqueur, 1994). In the Brezhnev era, regime conservatives tolerated and protected nationalist figures in order to buttress the Party's declining Marxist-Leninist legitimacy (Mitrokhin, 2003), while in the Gorbachev period, Kremlin conservatives were again the protégés of a new generation of Russophile groups (Dunlop, 1993).

However, such accounts generally over-emphasise these links, assuming that they are rising inexorably. In contrast, the Medvedev interregnum coincided with the mothballing of the Nashi group, while Western analysts paid more attention to Dugin's apparent rise than they did to his 2014 dismissal as head of the Sociology Department at Moscow State University. Nor did they note the rehabilitation of 'liberal' figures (e.g. Kudrin and Kirienko) to the Kremlin after 2015 (Laruelle 2017). Moreover, they exaggerate the utility of regime-sponsored nationalism. There are significant doubts as to whether regime legitimacy in 2012-3 was so weak as to necessitate a risky diversionary manoeuvre. The impact of the 2011-2 protests is contestable and in any case, by early 2014, Putin had silenced the domestic opposition (Tsygankov, 2015).

Liberal views are strongest when they concentrate in detail on domestic regime functions without over-reliance on transitological frameworks. For example, several works use the term 'managed nationalism' to highlight how Kremlin policy and nationalist groups inter-relate (Horvath, 2014; Laine, 2015). This concept focuses on how the Kremlin's use of nationalism is profoundly instrumental, and nationalism can be encouraged as well as actively oppressed, whenever it suits regime goals.

Among the most productive accounts are those that reject the realist view of the state as unified actor and probe the ways in which nationalism maps onto Russia's complex informal elite networks. For Kimberley Marten (2015), Russian policy-making is opaque, contradictory, shambolic and often self-defeating by nature, which is explained by the contestation of self-interested regime networks who have no strategic view in mind, let alone a united conception of 'national interests' Where nationalism fits in is that 'assertive' nationalism is usually bluster designed to signify strength for disciplining domestic networks. However, regime networks' self-interest results in risk-aversion beneath the bluster. For Marten (2015, p. 83), Russia's annexation of Crimea was only possible since it was a 'low-risk' endeavour, given 'its overwhelming ethnic Russian majority, its long history as a Russian imperial subject, and its rather arbitrary re-designation from a Russian to Ukrainian Soviet territory under Nikita Khrushchev'.

A similar, but more developed, view is offered by Henry Hale (2016). He broadens the regime's use of nationalism from simply expediency or legitimacy to a fundamental question of elite survival – the function of patronal presidents (i.e. those whose core role is as patrons of rent-seeking networks). From this perspective, whereas previously Putin had relied sparingly on domestic nationalism because it was politically risky, his 'conservative turn' raised its prominence. It thereby solved a fundamental problem of regime stability after 2011, by delegitimising liberal constituencies, by giving Putin's third term a revived political narrative, and by consolidating elites around the president. Similarly, Neil Robinson (2017, p. 360) highlights how the 'conservative turn' provided an answer to the regime's long-term modernisation dilemmas, by attempting to shift 'the ground of what counted as success in state building from issues of functionality towards vague and indeterminate goals based on a cultural rather than an administrative conception of the state'. These perspectives help understand Russia's involvement in Ukraine, which, according to Hale (2016, p. 247) hit the 'sweet spot' of Russian nationalism: 'enhancing Russia's purity from the perspective of narrowly ethnic Russian nationalists while also restoring Moscow's

control over more lands of the former USSR'. Thus it consolidated multiple elite groups, public opinion and opposition nationalist groups round the regime.

Liberal approaches often also emphasise the international spill-over of domestic politics. By inverting Kantian democratic peace theory, they argue that increasing domestic authoritarianism/nationalism engenders aggressive/assertive foreign policy. Allegedly, Russia is offering a coherent ideology to challenge Western liberal-democratic values. Nationalism is seen as intrinsically linked to this ideology. As Edward Lucas has argued (2009, p. 14), the 'ideological conflict of the New Cold War is between lawless Russian nationalism and law-governed Western multilateralism.' Such views highlight the role of anti-Western ideologues and the alleged prominence of Eurasianism to indicate that the regime's foreign policy views are increasingly motivated by anti-Western nationalism (Clover, 2016; Laqueur, 2015). Similarly, the rise of the GONGOs is associated with a demonstrable 'preventive counter-revolution' against Western liberalism as encouraged by the early 2000s Colour Revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan (Horvath, 2012). After the Crimean intervention, it appears that domestic and foreign policy discourses have become fused around a nationalist core (e.g. Galeotti and Bowen, 2014). Symptomatic in this regard has been Russia's indirect support for nationalist groups in the Donbas, as well as often less concrete encouragement for a panoply of right-wing populist groups in Europe, chiefly Marine Le Pen's Front National (Pomerantsev, 2015). Such examples would most clearly show domestic nationalism underpinning Russian malfeasance, not just in the post-Soviet space but across the EU more widely.

These approaches rightly highlight the increased visibility of nationalist figures and themes in Russia's foreign as well as domestic policy. Furthermore, there are strong theoretical arguments for positing a link between illiberalism and nationalism. Arguably, illiberal nationalism is inherent to authoritarian or semi-authoritarian systems, which lack the representative institutions and cultures of compromise that might digest nationalism into milder forms. As Michael Mann argues (1995, p. 62), '[m]ild nationalism [...] is democracy achieved, aggressive nationalism is democracy perverted'. There is no *a priori* reason to think that such 'aggressive' nationalism wouldn't affect foreign policy.

However, liberal approaches often fail to provide a nuanced investigation of links between domestic and foreign policy. Implicitly, a direct relationship is often assumed (i.e. that foreign policy simply reflects domestic). To that end, the role of nationalist thinkers is often de-contextualised, with the visibility and declared influence of nationalists taken at face value. This leads to truisms that are seldom questioned, e.g. Aleksandr Prokhanov being 'Nightingale of the General Staff', or Aleksandr Dugin's being an influential 'Kremlin advisor'. In reality, such figures do not advise the Kremlin directly, and their influence is much more diffuse. It remains an open question as to whether Kremlin links with foreign 'nationalists' are driven by ideological or pragmatic motivations (Shekhovtsov, 2015).

Often, liberal approaches attribute nationalism a barely-warranted causative power. They tend to see it as a largely homogeneous, undifferentiated ideology. Implicitly or otherwise, they view it as characterised by an unchanging primordial anti-Westernism, whereas more constructivist approaches would emphasise that mutability, contestation and division are far more characteristic to it. Similarly, liberal approaches can use some highly normative terms with little attempt at accurate definition. For example, van Herpen (2015) regards the party of power 'United Russia' and the various pro-Kremlin GONGOs as examples of 'chauvinist ultranationalism'. An extreme example is Kuzio (2017), in whose work nationalism is a catch-all term for all kinds of

nefarious behaviour: not just foreign policy aggression but extra-judicial murder, corruption etc.

Overall, liberal approaches' value is in bringing domestic regime type and motivations to the fore, in particular, highlighting the regime's use of nationalist forces in power consolidation. These approaches are stronger in analysis of domestic than foreign politics. In the former, they identify the functionality of nationalism for regime electoral and legitimacy purposes. In the latter, they highlight the increasing role of nationalist intellectuals and ideas as potentially underpinning more assertive foreign policy agendas. However, in both cases, the liberal approach can be simplistic and selective, highlighting examples of nationalist influence outside broader policy-making contexts, and seeing nationalism as a reflexively anti-Western phenomenon.

The main strengths and weaknesses of all the above perspectives are summarised in Table 1. Clearly, they all have some validity. Realist approaches highlight the interest-based discourses that dominate Russian foreign policy, among which nationalism, at least until the 'conservative turn', has played a minor role; constructivist approaches show how Russian 'national interests' are subjectively constructed and domestically contested; nationalist ideas have played significant roles in such contestation and appear to be gaining traction; liberal approaches show how the 'rise' of nationalism is related to increasing illiberalism in domestic and foreign policy (albeit they exaggerate its role). What is largely lacking however, are more holistic approaches that acknowledge both the contested and diverse nature of Russian nationalisms and which seek explicitly to address their interaction with the multi-level nature of Russian policy-making. The next section focuses on two such approaches and how they might be developed further.

Table 1. The main approaches to explaining nationalism and RFP

	<i>Main explanations</i>	<i>Main strengths and weaknesses</i>
<i>Realist explanations</i>	<p>RFP motivated by material capabilities and global/regional balance of power; little role for ideologies generally and nationalism specifically</p> <p>Western threats to Russian sphere of influence (NATO, Coloured Revolutions, EU)</p>	<p><i>Strengths:</i> identifies main themes of Russian doctrine and official discourse; explains RFP ‘red lines’ towards NATO</p> <p><i>Weaknesses:</i> uncritical approach; no explanation for growing ideational factors; absence of threat-perception towards China</p>
<i>Constructivist explanations</i>	<p>Focus on domestic contestation of RFP, in which Russian nationalists play a key but subordinate role</p> <p>RFP motivated by search for Great Power recognition, status, prestige and honour</p>	<p><i>Strengths:</i> explains Russian focus on West as Other; brings ideational factors to the fore; explains growing focus on civilization and soft power; explains domestic contention</p> <p><i>Weaknesses:</i> generic approach that does not sufficiently explain link between discourse and policy; sees nationalists as undifferentiated whole</p>
<i>Liberal explanations</i>	<p>RFP has domestic sources; rise of nationalism explained by regime’s authoritarianism and attempt to divert attention from domestic policy failures</p> <p>Nationalism linked to foreign policy assertion. Russia seeks both to prevent democratic contagion in its immediate neighbourhood and challenge Western liberalism more broadly</p>	<p><i>Strengths:</i> focus on regime utilization of nationalism for legitimacy/expediency; explains ‘conservative turn’</p> <p><i>Weaknesses:</i> normative approach that exaggerates unity and strength of nationalism; exaggerates and reifies nationalism as eternally rising; subjective view of policy failure</p>

Source: author, inspired by Götz (2016).

Towards a holistic model of nationalism and RFP

There have been several recent works linking the study of nationalism to regime dynamics in a more detailed and holistic fashion. Kolstø and Blakkisrud (2016) focus on the role of nationalist groups and national identity, while Cadier and Light (2015) address domestic and foreign policy in the aftermath of the conservative turn. These are detailed and theoretically eclectic edited volumes (albeit drawing most on liberalism and constructivism, and in Cadier and Light's case the Foreign Policy Analysis tradition). Both see nationalism as on the rise and (particularly the latter) conclude both that foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy, and that nationalism plays a great role within the latter. However, only two approaches explicitly aim to provide a multilevel conceptual model for Russian nationalism's policy-making role, Luke March (2012a, 2012b) and Marlène Laruelle (2017a). The ensuing analysis will outline how these complementary works can provide a road-map for future research.

Like several aforementioned accounts, March sees Kremlin's overall approach as 'managed nationalism'. He further argues that managed nationalism is consistent with the Kremlin's general approach to civil society, sometimes described as 'managed pluralism' (Balzer 2003). This is the way in which the regime sets the agenda for 'healthy' socio-political competition and stigmatises those outside this agenda. Managed nationalism permits nationalism that does not fundamentally challenge the authoritarian state, which gives an inbuilt advantage to illiberal and even extremist forms, but is generally inimical to any liberal nationalism that critiques the state. This managed nationalism consists of three interlocking spheres (March, 2012a):

1. *Official nationality* is named because it is functionally equivalent to Tsarist Official Nationality in terms of being only quasi-nationalist (state interests are prior to the nation's) and in its broader aim of co-opting patriotic sentiment in the interests of preserving internal and external regime stability against foreign threats. It is contained in official Kremlin statements, such as presidential addresses and foreign policy doctrines that articulate the *gosudarstvennik* (statist) position. This is a relatively moderate, pro-European, secular and pragmatic conservatism most cogently articulated in the doctrine of 'sovereign democracy'.
2. *Cultural nationalism* is principally the mainstream intellectual and media discourse and symbols that aim to reinforce the historical, moral and social aspects of a distinct Russian 'national' way of life and thereby build a sense of national solidarity.
3. *Political nationalism* is simply domestic electoral and social mobilization around nationalist motifs.

The regime actively shapes the relationship among these three spheres: official nationality sets down the parameters for the cultural and political sphere that are allowed some autonomy within (and occasionally, beyond) these limits as long as they do not fundamentally challenge it. Furthermore, managed nationalism has a long historical tradition and echoes the way the Kremlin over the ages has periodically used nationalist sentiment while trying to remain autonomous from it. Kremlin policy is very rarely nationalist *per se* (cf. Tuminez, 2000).

This is a paradoxical process; the Kremlin sometimes encourages nationalism, but sometimes has to rein nationalist forces in, often with oppressive methods. Increasingly

during the Putin regime, the need to encourage nationalism in the cultural and political realm has conflicted with the Kremlin's officially restrained policy, risking creating a self-sustaining momentum to which the Kremlin has to respond.

Supporting some constructivist views of a 'civilizational turn', we can see that, even prior to the more recent 'conservative turn', a dominant theme of both cultural and political nationalism had become 'civilisational nationalism', which emphasises the uniqueness of Russian 'civilisation' and contrasts it against the Western 'Other' (especially pro-Western governments in Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova) (Shnirel'man, 2007). This civilisational nationalism often directly contradicts the pro-European, modernist and pragmatic elements of official nationality. This tendency also gives support to the liberal view of the regime's domestic legitimacy as relying on a 'besieged fortress' paradigm.

The 'rise' of nationalism can be explained partly as a legitimating device against perceived external threats (e.g. Coloured Revolutions) and domestic policy problems (the focus on external enemies makes a convenient distraction). As Laruelle argues (2015), state-created nationalism is mainly used instrumentally as a post-hoc policy justification. But March's approach also emphasises that nationalism is dialectical. The Kremlin is a keen observer (as well as manipulator) of public opinion (Zygar', 2016, p. 239). Given state control of the electronic media, a vicious circle of 'civilisational nationalism' is created. The state allows such nationalism to dominate the public space. Undoubtedly, this must re-inform Kremlin policy by creating a demand that it then has to respond to.

Indeed, March (2012b) shows how the 'mission creep' of civilizational nationalism grew before and after Russia's intervention in Georgia in 2008. Hard-line nationalists were the dominant cheerleaders for assertive solutions before and during the conflict. Moreover, Aleksandr Dugin reputedly trained South Ossetian militias in the run-up (Spiegel Online, 2008). Regime and nationalist policies coincided, albeit briefly (e.g. the October–November 2006 campaign against Georgians was 'the first incident of officially endorsed ethnic discrimination in contemporary Russia' (Kozhevnikova, 2007)). Furthermore, regime and nationalist discourses (e.g. the assertion of Georgian intervention in South Ossetia as 'genocide') were briefly symbiotic. The war gained Putin and Medvedev their then-highest public approval ratings and briefly endowed Medvedev with the nationalists' seal of approval. Moreover, this period had long-term effects, with civilizational nationalism appearing in the 2008 foreign policy concept for the first time, with the declaration that global politics were taking on a 'civilisational dimension'. However, the 'Five-Day War' also showed the paradoxicality of state-sponsored nationalism. The Kremlin was aware of nationalism escaping state control and President Medvedev warned about the dangers of domestic extremism even during the conflict. An incipient crackdown on domestic nationalist groups intensified until Putin's return in 2012 and until then the Kremlin, its increased emphasis on soft power and *Russkii mir* notwithstanding, tried to reassert the golden rule of a pragmatic, interest-based foreign policy that indicated a continued hesitancy about prioritising ideational factors abroad.

The main strengths of March's approach are that it links nationalism clearly to regime dynamics. In this case, factors include a long-term campaign of 'othering' Georgians, ad hoc policy improvisation as well as Medvedev's weak domestic legitimacy (Monaghan, 2008b). It further helps explain evident contradictions in state policy (i.e. attempts to utilise and repress Russian nationalism simultaneously). Moreover, such a multilevel approach can draw to different degrees on the aforementioned theoretical approaches, which at a macro-level appear mutually

contradictory. For example, it shows the essential validity of realist approaches in explaining the formal elements of RFP (especially the focus on NATO expansion as a threat, a more plausible motivation in the Georgian intervention than in the Crimean annexation). However, it makes clear that the realist approach does not explain domestic contestation over identity issues, which is better approached via a constructivist lens. As liberal approaches argue, March indicates how the regime has an interest in manipulating nationalism. However, contrary to these accounts, it shows that when nationalism directly impacts RFP, this occurs in a much more exceptional and limited fashion.

March's approach does have weaknesses. Although it can map the interaction between nationalism and domestic and foreign policy in some detail, it remains somewhat broad-brush. This is an inevitable corollary of the opacity of the Russian foreign policy process, but the approach is also predominantly discursive. It can explain temporal shifts in regime rhetoric and thereby show potential congruence between nationalist and regime ideas. However, it cannot show causation, and whether nationalist ideas directly impact specific foreign policy decisions.

Laruelle (2017) argues that more precise analysis needs to focus less on ideas and ideologues than the policy locus of nationalists; both in terms of interaction with elite groups and in more specific legislative outcomes. In doing so, she argues that the role of nationalists is much more constrained than often understood. They are just one of several interest groups, and not a unified one at that. The Kremlin generally keeps a distance from them, and utilises their ideas as one of several 'doctrinal products' on the 'ideological market' (Laruelle, 2017b). There is definitely evidence of increasing interaction with nationalists in the emergence of conservative ideology, although not all of this can accurately be regarded as nationalist. However, Laruelle (2015) identifies only limited evidence of direct, consistent nationalist impact on RFP (policy towards compatriots).

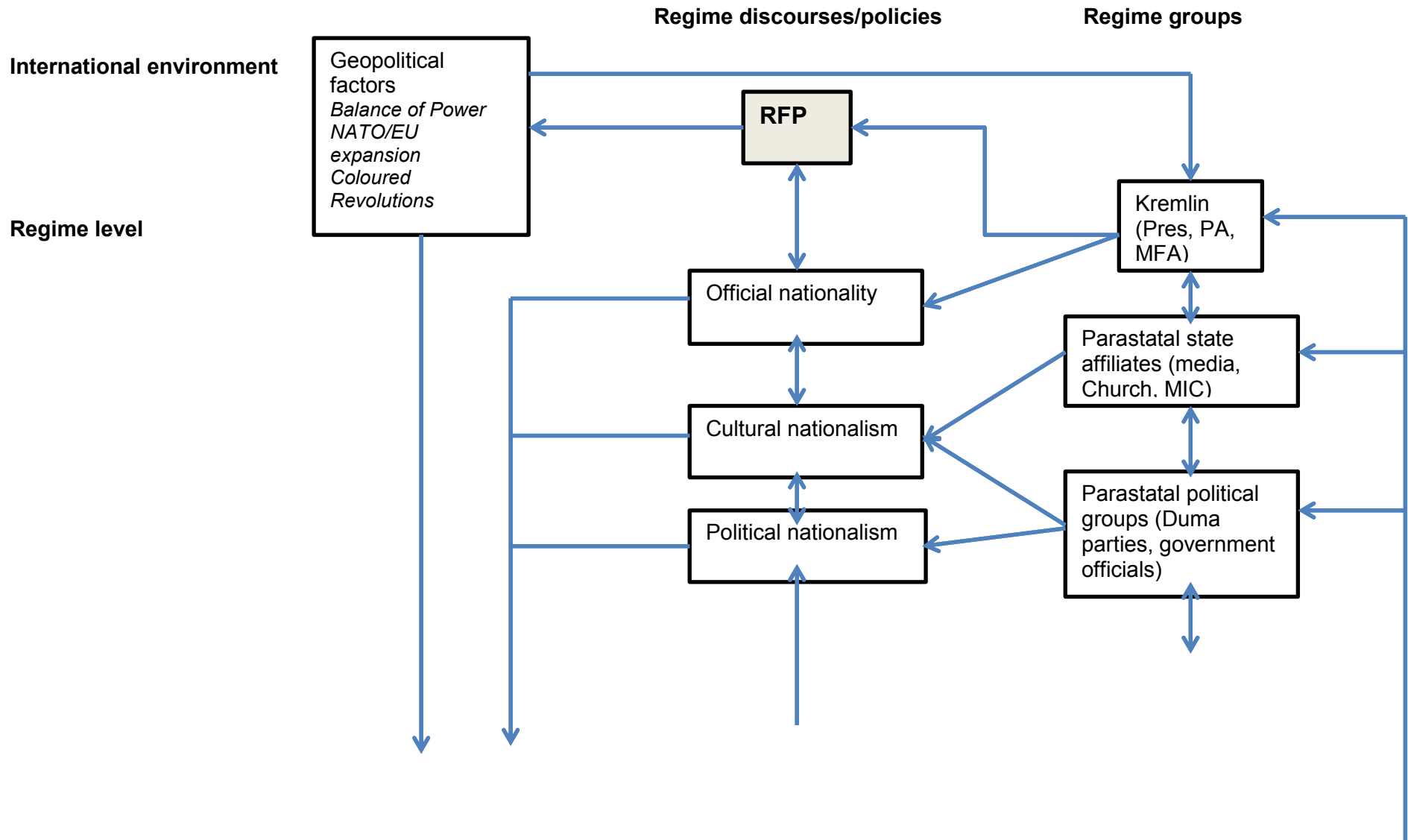
Laruelle (2017a) further identifies three main strata promoting a nationalist agenda. These are 1) *nonstate actors* (unregistered parties, social movements and social media/internet networks), including the National Bolsheviks, skinhead groups and the 'national democrats' (Aleksei Naval'nyi et al.), who want the Russian nation to rise up against the Putin regime; these groups are anti-system, but may have regime patrons; 2) *parastate actors*, who 'operate under the state umbrella, in the gray zone of the Kremlin's "ecosystem" of interest groups, lobbies, and personal connections' (2017a, p. 90). Such groups have their own interests and ideologies, and include the main Duma parties, the Russian Orthodox Church, Orthodox businessmen (e.g. Vladimir Yakunin and Konstantin Malofeev), as well as different governmental branches and the military industrial complex; 3) finally, there are state actors, primarily the President and Presidential Administration. Laruelle argues that this focus on groups and strategies allows a comprehensive assessment of the mobilisational potential of Russian nationalism. This approach is not unproblematic (e.g. the 'parastatal' groups, particularly the MIC, might be considered elements of the state). However, it does focus on the essential pluralism of Russian nationalism, its contested nature, and its different roles at multiple levels. Laruelle's argument is that nationalism is growing at grassroots level and receives increasing sympathy from some parastatal groups, but is so far limited by state co-optation and the antipathy of most groups to grassroots anti-regime ethnonationalism.

While Laruelle's approach does not directly engage with March's and has a different focus (more policy-oriented, but without explicitly mentioning RFP), it is largely complementary to it. This is especially so in its analysis of official nationality

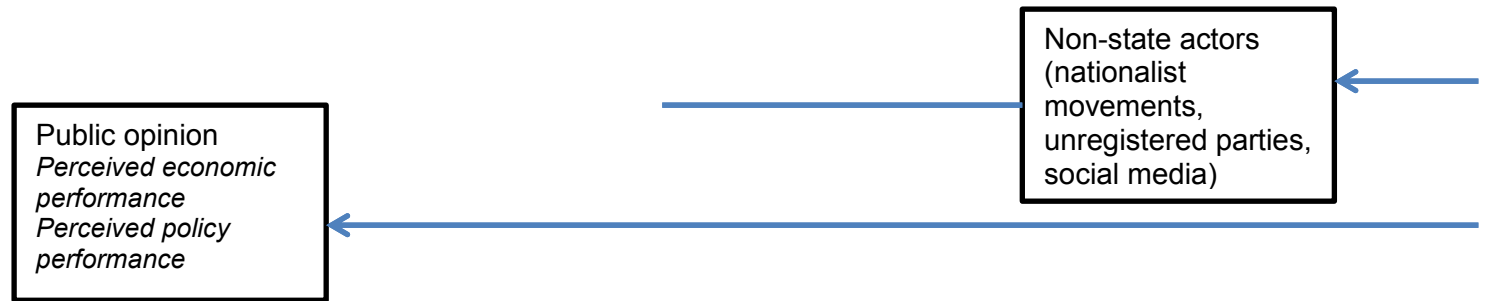
(what Laruelle calls ‘state nationalism’), which like March, Laruelle regards as inclusive, instrumental and ‘an eclectic piece of bricolage’ (2017a, p. 96). This state nationalism posits the state as ‘the symbol, embodiment, and quintessence of the nation’ (p. 95) and draws on a range of ideologies, not just nationalism. It is a flexible *mélange* of ideas that ‘guarantees stability in exchange for political loyalty and deference; and ... embodies historical continuity in the face of regime changes and collapses’ (p. 95). As such, it again recalls Tsarist Official Nationality. Convincingly, Laruelle argues that a state master-narrative is not unique to Russia. What is more noteworthy is ‘that the nation’s master narrative is intimately articulated and instrumentalized by the regime to secure its legitimacy and to marginalize opponents, real or imagined’ (p. 95). Contrary to liberal accounts, this is not ‘an inherent and essentialist Russian nationalism ... but the state’s use of the national grand narrative it produces in domestic political struggle is a critical characteristic of the regime’ (Ibid.). Laruelle’s approach is also clearly compatible with regime network accounts, inasmuch as it argues for pluralist and conflictual regime interests.

Using March and Laruelle’s accounts as bases, and drawing on the aforementioned theoretical approaches, we can outline a plausible model for how nationalism affects RFP that could form the basis for further research. This model is outlined in Figure 1, and then briefly outlined.

Figure 1. A model for understanding the interaction between nationalism and RFP



Domestic environment



This model has a constructivist underpinning, evidenced in the number of bidirectional arrows showing a reflexive relationship between, for example, public opinion and state discourses and the central importance of the latter. More specifically, although international geopolitical factors are of vital importance (top left box), unlike in a similar model by Götz (2016) which has a neo-classical realist framework, they do not have causative effect, reflecting the constructivist view that there are no ‘objective’ national interests independent of domestic contestation. The changing global/regional balance-of-power, and in particular the increasing prominence of Western influence in the ‘near abroad’ via NATO/EU expansion and the Coloured Revolutions have become vital to the regime’s threat perceptions. But these threats are mediated both by public opinion (bottom left box) and crucially by the Kremlin (top right). Their salience has changed over time. For instance, of particular importance appear to be Putin’s feelings of personal betrayal at a whole range of Western policies (especially regime change in Iraq and Syria and Western support for Russia’s opposition), as well as a shared Russian elite perception that Coloured Revolutions were engineered by Western security services rather than social change (Zygar’, 2016).

The second column represents the mechanisms of ‘managed nationalism’ as outlined by March, i.e. a range of interlocking discourses under the direct control of the state that seek to police public discourse over national values and to actively mould public opinion. As aforementioned, official nationality provides the parameters for cultural and political nationalism, although there is also a feedback loop from these to the official doctrine (e.g. the spillover of civilizational nationalism into official nationality and thence foreign policy). However, whereas the upwards arrow from official nationality indicates that this stands at the nexus between domestic and foreign policy, so nationalist discourse can thereby directly affect (and be affected by) RFP, this model does not assume that this is the main driver of RFP. The Kremlin retains direct and independent control over both official nationality and RFP. This reflects that a) the Kremlin can usually limit any spillover of more grassroots nationalism into official nationality and ‘turn off the tap’ where necessary and that b) many other Kremlin proclivities (doctrinal and personal) go directly into RFP, including personal pique and ad hoc improvisation.

The third column represents the regime groups outlined by Laruelle, and shows their input into nationalist discourse and policy making. Once again, the model is top-down, with policy-making centred on the Kremlin. However, in common with regime network models, the ‘presidential vertical’ is made of divergent and competing groups. Again, the Kremlin sets down the general parameters, but they have certain autonomy in interceding in public discourse. I have divided Laruelle’s ‘parastatal’ groups into *state affiliates* and *political groups*. The former are opinion formers (such as the ROC, media and the MIC), whose influence will be predominantly in the sphere of cultural nationalism. The latter include Duma political parties and government ministers, who also intercede into cultural nationalism. However, since they actively link their view of nationalism with their political campaigns, they are also part of the political nationalism realm. Non-state actors generally have little or no access to state media and are generally excluded from official license to influence public debates over nationality or other issues, and are therefore influential in the political nationalism discourse only.

Public opinion plays an important role in this model. The public can assess geopolitical factors directly (e.g. via the internet and social media), but clearly in Russia’s media environment, will be receptive to managed nationalism as it is promoted via the dominant pro-Kremlin (especially electronic) media. The model shows how the different elements of the regime are influenced by public opinion, particularly to the

degree that it reflects assessments of the regime's political and economic performance. How they respond to such information cannot be predicted, but, consistent with the liberal model, negative public assessments of regime performance provide an incentive to accentuate the importance of nationalism both in the domestic and foreign policy sphere.

Summing up, the above model provides a flexible, multilevel schema for understanding how nationalist discourses and regime interests interact. It highlights the important but variable role of nationalism in domestic discourse, and shows how it is a vital but far from decisive element in foreign policy. It is necessarily not conclusive but should provide a useful framework for future studies.

Towards testable hypotheses?

Nationalism's dialectical and discursive nature makes it difficult to subject rigorously to the discipline of hypotheses. Nevertheless, detailed analysis of how it interacts with the regime and policy-making realm along the lines of the above model could be instructive in illustrating the following propositions:

- 1) Nationalism is a socially constructed phenomenon, not a primordial entity. Therefore the role of nationalism in Russian foreign policy is not constant, nor doomed to rise inexorably.
- 2) (A linked issue) nationalism is not unitary: it is contested and multi-level. Consequently, official nationality is demonstrably different from the viewpoints of leading nationalist ideologues, but is itself the product of contestation between regime networks.
- 3) The oft-quoted leading nationalist ideologues are just one of several loose foreign policy tendencies, but do not amount to a coherent, united, let alone dominant nationalist 'school' in foreign policy.
- 4) Nationalism rarely impacts foreign policy directly. It is certainly part of the ideological arsenal of foreign policy makers. However, the default official position of Russian foreign policy is a pragmatic Realist world-view based on interests.
- 5) Typically, the regime tries to utilise nationalism instrumentally for domestic legitimacy; it tries both to exploit and to limit such nationalism, not always successfully.
- 6) When nationalism does impact foreign policy more directly, this is in conditions of regime instability, when its domestic legitimacy is threatened, and outside systemic factors (e.g. Coloured Revolutions, NATO expansion) make elites feel vulnerable.
- 7) Following such crises, the regime tries to reassert control over the nationalist agenda.
- 8) However, the 'bait-and-switch' tactic risks provoking nationalist groups and demands in wider society, that then prove difficult to control.

Future questions and themes

Testing the above propositions is not easy, and needs a multilevel approach with detailed investigation both of regime dynamics and policy making. Approaches that are derived too closely from system-level theories of IR are unlikely to be revealing.

The main weakness afflicting all approaches to RFP is lack of access to the policy-making 'black box'. Despite official secrecy, demystifying the Russian foreign

policy making process to identify intentions, not just outcomes, and to isolate the real (not alleged) role of nationalists is vital. Interviewing policy-makers and experts with inside knowledge is clearly difficult, but in principle methodologically possible and essential. For instance, there are still major divergences between the ‘collective Putin’ view of the president as largely an arbiter of elite interests (Götz, 2016) and those who see him as having the last word on essential decisions (Zygar’, 2016).

In the probable absence of much necessary information, there is still scope for familiar investigations into the role of nationalist thinkers and think-tanks, and of nationalist ideas in public debates. Recent research is beginning to focus on newer groups and figures (such as the Izborskii Club and the *Sputnik i Pogrom* blog) (e.g. Laruelle, 2016). However, Laruelle is right to propose moving away from focussing on ideologues towards policy processes. This chapter’s model can be tested and developed in order to systematise and link such research directions, particularly if it is applied to within-case comparisons over space and time (cf. Götz, 2016). Analysing the development of Russia’s policy towards different post-Soviet states will help theorise the degree to which ‘nationalism’ is a consistent feature of its policy, or rather, as is probable, only those most attracted by the Western ‘Other.’

Similarly, since the Russian regime’s relationship with nationalism is a moving target, there is scope for reviewing over-hasty contemporaneous assumptions with the benefit of hindsight. For example, immediately after the ‘conservative turn’ and Crimean annexation, it became axiomatic that Russian nationalism had become a mainstream element in Russian foreign policy making for the first time. However, a longer-term view indicates first, that the miscegenation of nationalism and foreign policy had already started with the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict; second, that after the Crimean intervention, the familiar pattern of elite repression of nationalism reasserted itself, with the sidelining of nationalist groups at home and in the Donbas (Kolstø, 2016b), and the de-escalation of Ukraine as a subject of public concern. Therefore in the *longue durée*, the Crimean intervention might look far less exceptional.

Moreover, research in the ideational development of Russian nationalism and foreign policy might usefully develop more sophisticated methods of process-tracing and discourse analysis in order to avoid more impressionistic accounts of the alleged influence of nationalist ideas on debate (Beach and Pedersen, 2013; Götz, 2016). A recent paper by Frear and Mazepus (2017), which traces the ideational themes in official policy documents, shows a usefully replicable and simple methodology.

Another highly relevant theme is Russia’s direct sponsoring of nationalists abroad. Russia’s aid to the Donbas rebellion remains more dominated by sensationalist journalistic accounts than serious analysis and fuller accounts of the so-called ‘nationalist international’ remain forthcoming (Shekhovtsov, 2018). This work is focussed on the radical right, but there is need also to focus on the European radical left, who retain a Russophile constituency. There are many questions to explore, such as the role of ideology versus instrumentality, and the nature of support, be it financial, logistical, or moral.

Overall, there remains a compelling need for more nuanced and less normative accounts of nationalism that do not assume *a priori* that Russian nationalism is bad and aggressive (Laruelle, 2014). Indeed, the degree to which Russian nationalism is *sui generis* and predisposed to authoritarian and aggressive overtones needs to be a research question corroborated by extensive data rather than a normative truism. To this end, there is clearly scope for analyses that explore the impact of nationalism on foreign policy in comparative context, not solely via single-country case studies.

Conclusion

The above analysis has surveyed the disparate field of nationalism and foreign policy. It has argued that focussing on nationalism is an important element to understanding contemporary RFP, providing that it is understood as a multifaceted and multilevel phenomenon interlinking different discursive and policy fields, domestic and foreign, but not a homogenous variable that in any way 'drives' Russian foreign policy, either in general or towards the West.

Many approaches to Russian nationalism are derived (explicitly or not) from macro-level IR theories. These provide insights, but struggle to offer a sufficiently nuanced and flexible account able to address the variable role of nationalism in RFP. In particular, realist accounts largely dismiss nationalism's function, whereas liberal accounts largely exaggerate it as an ideological underpinning for regime actions. Constructivist approaches are better at showing how nationalist views interact with domestic national identity debates; however, they tend to exaggerate the homogeneity of nationalist constituencies, while lacking sufficient attention to how nationalists interact with policy processes.

Only multi-level accounts which focus on how nationalism interacts with regime policy-making, legitimacy and intra-regime networks can fully identify the nationalism-RFP nexus, and only by taking account of both the ideational influence of nationalism and the policy context of its proponents. This is a topic needing detailed longitudinal empirical investigation and comparative analysis, and this chapter has provided a model that will help illuminate this research direction. Fortunately or otherwise, the recent direction of the Russian regime indicates that the topic of Russian nationalism and foreign policy is unlikely to lose salience any time soon.

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